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ABSTRACT

Describing the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) program and its mission to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast, this paper discusses ways that teachers can decipher their students' progress in reading to help further develop students' reading skills. It is based on site visits to 18 schools endorsed as having strong reading programs. After a brief overview, it summarizes 10 needs and strategies for improving reading and then presents these needs, strategies, and results in more detail. The paper concludes that the 10 strategies described need to be considered in the context of the "big picture" (the way the faculty approaches its work); and that the schools visited are not doing any one thing exclusively. Contains 31 references. Four appendixes contain a questionnaire, a list of schools considered in the study, 8 points on how children learn to read, and a 95-item bibliography. (SC)

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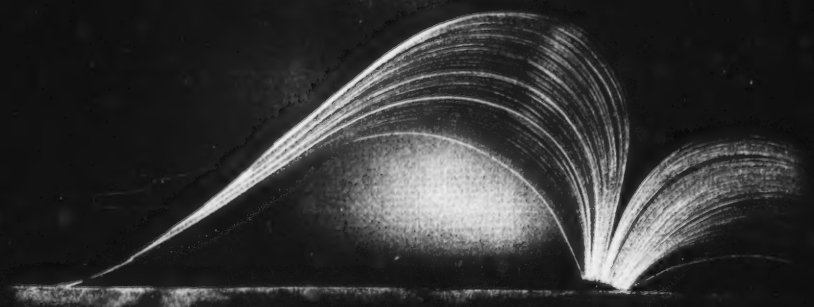
Southeastern School Strategies



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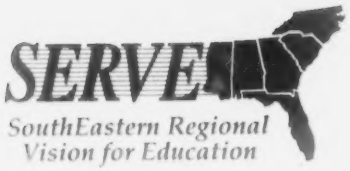
IMPROVING READING

Southeastern School Strategies

Written for SERVE by
C. Steven Bingham, Ed.D.

Improving Reading is part of a series of products designed to address the improvement of reading literacy in the Southeast, including a videomagazine on *Leading Change in Reading Literacy* and a case study of two district-designed reading programs. The project reported in this document was directed by Wendy McColskey, Ph.D., SERVE Director of Assessment, Accountability, and Standards. SERVE thanks the principals and teachers of all participating schools and school districts who made this product possible.



SERVE
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Special Thanks . . .
to the principals, teachers, and parents of the more than two dozen southeastern schools we visited in researching this publication. Your belief in the capacity of every child to read and write effectively and your ability to see that it happens is an inspiration to educators everywhere.

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About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is an educational organization whose mission is to promote an support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To address the mission, SERVE engages in research and development in educational issues of critical importance to educators in the region and in the provision of research-based services to SEAs and LEAs which are striving for comprehensive school improvement. Committed to a shared vision of the future of education in the region, the organization is governed by a board of directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and representatives of teachers and the private sector.

SERVE's core component is a Regional Educational Laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. SERVE has additional major funding from the Department in the areas of Migrant Education and School Leadership and is the lead agency in the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium for the Southeast and the Southeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SEIR◆TEC). Based on these grants and contracts, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding to local, regional, and national needs. These program areas are

- Program on Assessment, Accountability, and Standards
- Program for Children, Families, and Communities
- Program on Education Policy
- Program for the Improvement of Science and Mathematics Education
- Program on School Development and Reform
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SERVE's National Specialty Area is Early Childhood Education, and the staff of SERVE's Program for Children, Families, and Communities is developing the expertise and the ability to provide leadership and support to the early childhood community nationwide for children from birth to eight years old.

In addition to the program areas, the SERVE Evaluation Department supports the evaluation activities of the major grants and contracts and provides evaluation services to SEAs and LEAs in the region. Through its Publishing and Quality Assurance Department, SERVE publishes a variety of studies, training materials, policy briefs, and other products of the programs. These informative and low-cost publications include guides to available resources, summaries of current issues in education policy, and examples of exemplary educational programs. Through its programmatic, evaluation, and publishing activities, SERVE also provides contracted staff development and technical assistance in many areas of expertise to assist education agencies in achieving their school improvement goals.

The SERVE head office is at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with major staff groups located in Tallahassee, FL, and Atlanta, GA, and policy advisors in each state department of education in the region. Current and detailed information on any of the program and service areas noted here may be found on SERVE's site on the World Wide Web at www.serve.org.

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urpose of Document

Whitney, an inquisitive third-grader, sat down at her desk, flipped open a book during the designated "reading time," and began reading. Any parent, teacher, student, or complete stranger could observe that Whitney was reading, but what was her current reading level? The fact is we cannot determine a child's reading level or skills by mere observation. State standardized test scores offer some comparative data, but they do not clearly establish how instructional programs compare to others. Teachers need to know how to decipher their students' progress in reading to help further develop students' reading skills. This can be accomplished by "benchmarking," a technique used by organizations to look outward for models to compare to their efforts.

Improving Reading is meant for educators who are committed to and excited about helping benchmark their school's efforts to improve reading. It summarizes what a team of SERVE colleagues learned from site visits to 18 schools endorsed as having strong reading programs. The schools cited are listed so that you may personalize your benchmarking experience by contacting these schools and comparing progress notes on programs and reading improvement efforts. In addition, SERVE has developed a video that examines the reading programs at the visited sites. Educators must recognize that continuous improvement on the part of all faculty members is essential in creating and maintaining solid programs. Therefore, we recommend that the video be viewed in faculty meetings in order to generate ideas and determine plans of action based on each schools' individual needs. It is crucial for educators to acknowledge that continuous improvement requires consistent review of schools' strengths and weaknesses to produce students with exceptional reading abilities.

Overview

Without expanding instruction to meet the requirements o
21st century workplace, students will have increased
culty in achieving gainful employment in a flourishing
bal job market. Fortunately, administrators and teachers
becoming progressively aware of the need to improve reading instruction an
student literacy. Greater numbers of educators are acknowledging the signifi-
cance of enhancing students' capacity to read and write at higher levels.

The demands of meeting employers' needs for a highly literate workforce are without precedent. Particularly in the Southeast, where little more than a generation ago the regional economy was driven by employment in low-wage, low-skill factories and family farms, expectations for teaching literacy to all students have never been greater. While many of our parents and grandparents did not earn a high school diploma, today's high school graduates are seeking work in areas requiring higher levels of comprehension and literacy. For instance, employees in factories such as Hoechst Celanese in Greenville, South Carolina; Burroughs-Welcome in Raleigh, North Carolina; and Mercedes-Benz in Vance, Alabama, are expected to comprehend complex technical text. This example illustrates the need for educators to challenge their students and heighten literacy outcome standards in the Southeastern region and beyond.

The adage "Well begun is half-done" suggests that *well* is the most challenging and important component of any initiative. Beginning well implies defining a problem area. Schools implicitly define a problem by the choices they make concerning where to focus their improvement efforts. The notion of choices leads to a second assumption, embodied in the adage, "There are many ways up the mountain." Each school situation is unique. Therefore, it is unrealistic and even implausible to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to reading improvement that will work for every school. That is, the school improvement process lends itself better to *description* rather than *prescription*.

When SERVE's team visited schools, they found a wide variety of successful approaches and programs being implemented to improve literacy. They did not encounter one "right answer" to the problem of improved reading but rather uncovered multiple initiatives being used in various areas, such as curriculum development, assessment, professional development, and parent involvement. In the following pages, you will see some of the viable paths several schools have taken. Ideally, the SERVE team's summary of the actions of these 18 schools will help you identify problems which are not currently being addressed in your school.

Methodologically, this document builds from site-visits and classroom observations at schools across the Southeast. The team interviewed teachers, students, parents, and principals at these schools. They also analyzed school, Local Education Agency (LEA), and State Education Agency (SEA) documents. Schools selected for visitation were recommended as having "successful" reading programs or making "significant progress" in reading by SEA, LEA, or Institute of Higher Education (IHE) personnel familiar with the schools' reading literacy programs and student outcomes.

All visits were made in the spring and fall of 1997. (Please see Appendix A for guiding questions.) Of the total number of schools visited, 18 were documented in case reports and comprise the foundation of this study. The names, addresses, principals, and phone and fax numbers of the 18 schools, as well as others contributing to the research project, are provided for your use in Appendix B.

Summary of Strategies Used in Schools

A number of strategies for improving reading emerged from the studied schools. During their visits, the SERVE team found that these schools had made a variety of improvements. The improvements implied that certain needs existed prior to the change. Figure 1 on page nine summarizes the needs and improvement strategies used in these "successful" schools.

In the following section, school initiatives are described in the context of the 10 need and strategy areas identified above. Supporting research and literature for each strategy are cited, and implementation and results from actual southeastern school classrooms are shared.

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Figure 1

Summary of School Needs and Improvement Strategies

Need	Improvement Strategies
Reading program purpose, goals, and expected student outcomes need to be discussed and shared.	Develop teacher study groups; discuss vision of what constitutes good instructional practice; study state content standards; inform and involve parents.
The reading program needs to be consistent across a school.	Adopt or adapt a research-based model outlining how instructional time is spent.
Texts and other materials need to fit the program goals.	Select appropriate materials.
Instruction needs to be individualized (with some students needing more support than others.)	Consider how to provide intensive support where needed (e.g., Success for All, Reading Recovery, reduced class size, tutors, etc.)
Students need to read frequently (relevant, leveled books of their choice.)	Identify book lists (provided by Accelerated Reader); consider ways to encourage/celebrate reading comprehension through meaningful student-led discussions.
Students' progress needs to be assessed and documented.	Develop schoolwide portfolios based on regular assessments of reading and writing competencies; redesign report cards; conference with students and parents.
Teachers need more knowledge of reading research.	Offer reading courses; develop teacher study groups; institute teacher book study clubs.
Teachers need continuous feedback on how to apply new instructional approaches.	Use consultants, mentors, and peer coaches.
Reading needs to be considered as a cross-disciplinary skill.	Use reading and writing across the curriculum.
Reading needs to be modeled.	Implement schoolwide reading events; identify community resources.

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Needs, Strategies, and Results

Strategy 1

Developing Teacher Study Groups; Discussing a Vision of What Constitutes Good Instructional Practice; Studying State Content Standards; Informing and Involving Parents

According to Wheatley, organizational developers have long recognized that people support what they create.[1] If improving reading is a desired goal, then school leaders must acknowledge the need to involve those who will be implementing new practices and programs in the design. Parents, too, may be brought aboard as partners in the teaching-learning process. With all stakeholders included and a common language developing, practices that are most likely to succeed in that school community may be shared. Without the development of shared purpose, goals, objectives, and strategies, schools will struggle to attain consistent development of literacy outcomes across classrooms. Many schools develop teacher study groups based on the discovery that teamwork is both beneficial and conducive to teaching and learning reading. Teachers and administrators at Central Elementary School in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and Poplarville Lower and Upper Elementary Schools in Poplarville, Mississippi, are good examples of professionals who have coordinated their efforts to study what works in reading in order to examine what might work in their schools.

Located near the agricultural and fishing area of Pasquotank Sound, Central Elementary serves approximately 575 students, grades K-5. Spurred by the superintendent's vision for improvement and mirroring a districtwide process, the principal and teachers of Central Elementary first analyzed their reading instruction strengths and weaknesses. To address and remediate weaknesses, teachers engaged in a study of reading research and literature, including Cunningham and Allington's *Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write*, Cunningham's *Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing*, and Routman's *Literacy At the Crossroads*. In addition, all teachers were trained by an outside consultant to use Hyerle's *Thinking Maps*, which infuses graphic organizers to assist student writers.[2] As the consultant worked with them over a two-year period, teachers recognized additional weaknesses in their approach to reading and writing instruction and committed to create a "game plan."

Their efforts resulted in a framework for communication skills consisting of six instructional components:

- Teacher Read Aloud
- Self-selected Reading with Teacher/Student Conferences
- Teacher-Directed Reading
- Writing
- Word Skills
- Take-Home Reading

The Communication Skills framework and accompanying rubric for teacher self-assessment, however, was not universally accepted. Convinced that if more teachers were involved in examining research, they would embrace—or amend—the

[1] *Wheatley, 1992.*

[2] *Hyerle, 1995.*

framework, the superintendent established a districtwide Communication Skills Leadership Council. The Council consisted of about 28 K-6 teachers, including representatives from Central Elementary. Teachers were subdivided into groups of three and asked to research and report on one of eight critical reading issues, ranging from spelling and grammar instruction to the purpose of oral reading.

By the end of the next school year, the Council had revised the framework and created a document teachers could support. Council members increased the value of the document for teachers by adding useful resource materials such as

- Suggested lists of graded read-alouds
- Methods for conducting reading conferences
- A checklist to monitor skills taught
- Samples of take-home reading management forms
- Essential skills for each grade
- Rubrics for assessing writing

(For information on these materials, contact Virginia Houston at Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools, Elizabeth City, North Carolina.)

The teacher study groups at Central and other Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County schools have produced remarkable results. During the pilot year of the state accountability plan, every elementary school in the district demonstrated "Exemplary" growth, achieving 110 percent of academic expectations for progress. When the scores were disaggregated, school leaders found that all subsets of students (gifted, minorities, females, low-performing, etc.) showed growth. In the next year, 75 percent of district elementary schools reached "Expected" standards for growth, and four schools again attained "Exemplary" growth. These outstanding results were accomplished while testing over 98 percent of all students, despite the state's allowance for up to 5 percent of exceptional children to be excluded from end-of-grade tests.

The Poplarville Upper and Lower Elementary Schools in Poplarville, Mississippi, organized study groups designed to improve reading literacy through identifying expected student outcomes. As a rural district, Poplarville serves about 1,900 students. Fifteen percent are African-American, and the remainder are white. Although Poplarville schools serve the majority of students quite well, administrators wished to increase the achievement of students in the lowest quartile. As about 25 percent of Poplarville students ultimately drop out of school, administrators conjectured that those students dropping out are likely the same ones whose literacy achievement is below grade level. One response was to enable teachers to meet within and across grade levels in curriculum teams each month. Among the school's responsibilities was the development of literacy standards for the district. This process is called TALK-12 (Teachers As Leaders K-12). Using this teacher study group to specify the desired reading and writing outcomes allows student goals to be better understood.

Clearly teachers are important stakeholders in the design of reading improvement efforts. Some schools also treat parents as important stakeholders in the reading program. Babson Park Elementary School, in Babson Park, Florida, illustrates the many ways of involving parents in the reading program. Babson Park, located among the citrus groves and phosphate mines of central Florida, serves about 400 students, grades K-5. Six in every ten children qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch. Parent involvement in the school and with reading is pervasive. Parents are often found reading to students, listening to students read, or sharing personal experience or folklore stories. Yet, Babson's efforts extend beyond the norm. The Babson staff, which embraces the parent as a genuine partner, nurtures parental involvement by constantly keeping the parents "in the loop." This is done via weekly progress reports, "Parent Packets" for each grade level (outlining curricula, procedures, and assessments), and the "Babson Park News," a paper written and published by students for and about the school community. Of particular interest is the biannual "Parent Portfolio Night," in which children share with their parents the work they have produced during the course of the year. The contents of the portfolio, typically containing poetry, prose, and original informational text, are compiled throughout the year such that, when parents return for the second visit, the child's progress is apparent. Participating teachers report that nearly 100 percent of parents, many of whom report being emotionally moved, regularly attend the event.

Strategy 2

Adopting or Adapting a Research-Based Model Outlining How Instructional Time is Spent

Allington and Cunningham maintain that in schools with effective literacy programs, principals and teachers have blocked out certain periods to devote solely to reading and writing.[3] In addition, according to the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, some schools have extended their school day to increase learning opportunities for deficient readers, another practice with a growing research base.

Several schools documented in this study have reconfigured their daily or weekly schedule to optimize literacy learning. Hillcrest Elementary in Morganton, North Carolina, and LaBelle Elementary in LaBelle, Florida, are outstanding examples. Hillcrest serves about 350 students, grades K-5. Of these, 25 percent receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Student transience and poverty are cited as chronic problems. The Hillcrest reading program is characterized by an SRA component emphasizing vocabulary, decoding, and word-attack skills, as well as a Literature Circles component targeting comprehension and reading for pleasure and reflection.[4] During both parts, students are re-assigned to small, like-ability, multiage groups for instruction by all trained staff members, including teacher assistants and specialists. The SRA component lasts 45 minutes daily; the literature circles component occurs 60 minutes three times weekly. A complementary literary activity occupies the other two days. Hillcrest has achieved outstanding results using this combination of word skills and literature discussion groups.

Sometimes a school adopts or adapts a pre-established set of instructional strategies. Patricia Cunningham's "Four Blocks" framework is a set of strategies employed with increasing frequency in southeastern schools.[5] Brockington Elementary School in Timmonsville, South Carolina, is an out-

[3] *Allington and Cunningham, 1996.*
[4] *Daniels, 1994.*
[5] *Cunningham and Hall, 1997.*

standing example of progress that can be made when all teachers use the same set of strategies.

Brockington Elementary has a student population of about 487 students; 90 percent are African-American. Two years ago, Brockington was identified for participation in a state assistance program. As one strategy for improvement, a consultant was hired to train teachers in the "Four Blocks" methodology. The method called for providing extended and sustained periods of time (2.25-2.5 hours daily) for shared read-alouds, self-selected reading, word work, and writing. Characteristically, teachers reveal personal experiences and activate students' prior knowledge as they

- Share books
- Provide developmentally appropriate books and time for reading texts of choice for and by students
- Engage students in play with words using onsets and rhymes
- Post high-frequency words on a word wall in the classroom
- Conduct mini-lessons which model the writing process
- Engage in writing conferences

Brockington teachers assert that before "Four Blocks" everyone was "doing their own thing." Developing a common language and standardizing practice is paying off for Brockington in terms of standardized test scores as well. In two years, the percent of first-graders scoring above the 50th percentile on the MAT-7 reading test has climbed from 20 to 46 percent. For second-graders, the results are even more astounding—an increase from nine to 40 percent. The reduction of students scoring in the lowest quartile of the criterion-referenced South Carolina Basic Skills Test is also noteworthy. From 1995 to 1997, first-graders in the bottom fourth fell from 58 percent to 26 percent; during the same period, lowest scoring second-graders plummeted from 68 percent to 24 percent.

Strategy 3

Addressing the Need to Select Appropriate Materials

While adopting a new reading textbook every few years is a common SEA or LEA event, the practice of an individual school selecting a series that best addresses its unique student needs or teacher beliefs is not as common. When thoughtfully done, the results for literacy improvement can be dramatic. Teachers at Club Boulevard Elementary in Durham, North Carolina, and Jesse Wharton Elementary in Greensboro, North Carolina, have built their reading programs around the *Success in Reading and Writing* text series. Club Boulevard is an arts and humanities magnet school serving about 420 students, grades K-5; 70 percent are African-American and poor. Massive amounts of money have been allocated for staff development over the last several years, providing teachers training in thematic instruction, multiple intelligence theory, movement education, and authentic assessment.

Teachers have also interned at the Mary Altwell School, a laboratory school affiliated with Ohio State University's Reading Recovery program. Although training and instructional materials have fluctuated over the years, Club Boulevard teachers have continued to use the Ann Adams' *Success in Beginning Reading and Writing* text series as their primary reading resource. The series revolves around four components—research, rec-

reational reading, writing, and word study. As a framework for language arts instruction, the lessons are integrated with other subjects. One of the most unique components is research, which requires students to choose a topic, identify resources, and research problem solutions.

Teachers at the Jesse Wharton School in Greensboro, North Carolina, also selected the *Success in Reading and Writing* text. School leaders acclaim the series in a Wharton public relations document, calling it "a proven way of teaching and learning that captures the excitement of students . . . based on the belief that all children want to read, write, and learn . . . and used with students from language-poor or ESL backgrounds."[6] As an ESL site, Wharton teachers were particularly motivated to identify a reading/language arts text that would serve the special needs of their student population. While *Success* is arguably appropriate for any group of students, teachers at Wharton reasoned that this was the right choice for them.

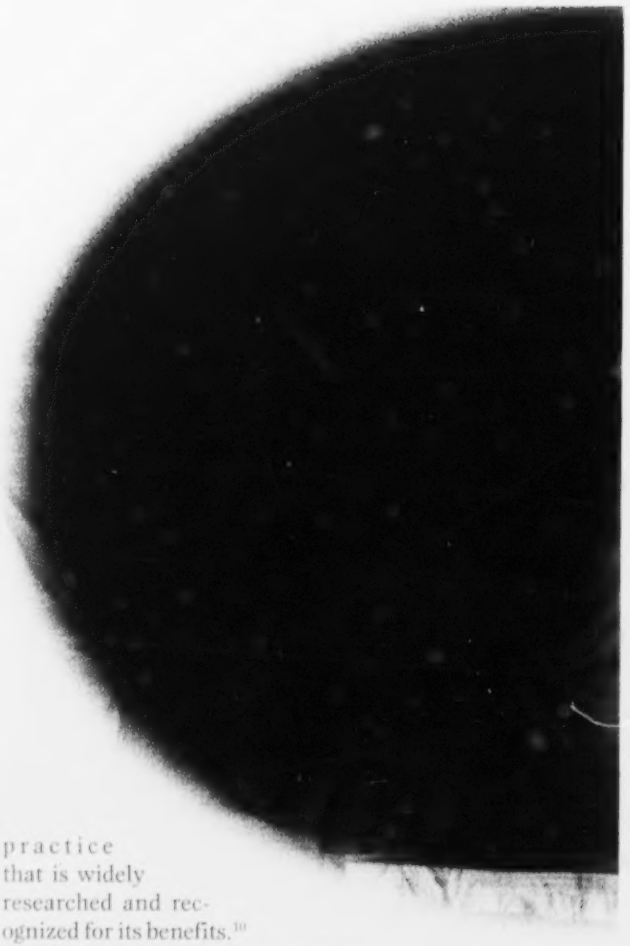
Strategy 4

Addressing Need to Consider How to Provide Intensive Support Where Needed

Slavin maintains that many schools across the Southeast have embraced Success for All (SFA)[7] or Reading Recovery[8] in efforts to improve reading and writing. While start-up and maintenance costs are often cited as prohibitive, the results in terms of student literacy improvement documented over years of implementation suggest that the programs can be effective in the long run.[9] One underlying reason is the extensive teacher training component involved in these programs.

Moreover, a commonality of both SFA and Reading Recovery is the practice of reducing the student-teacher ratio such that the time each child spends in one-on-one instruction is optimized, a

6. *Jesse Wharton Elementary School, 1996; page 2.*
7. *Slavin, et. al., 1994.*
8. *Clay, 1993.*
9. *Ross, Smith, Cassey, and Slavin, 1995.*
10. *Egelson, Harmon, and Achilles, 1996.*



practice that is widely researched and recognized for its benefits.[10] With all the recent interest in research on reducing class size, SERVE produced a document for educators that summarizes this research entitled *Does Class Size Make a Difference?* In SFA, students are homogeneously grouped by reading ability into classes of no more than 12-16 pupils, each with a trained adult instructor. In its simplest form, Reading Recovery utilizes only one reading specialist with one first-grade deficient reader. However, notable whole-group applications of Reading Recovery strategies exist that combine one-on-one instruction with reduced class-size.

In rural Anson County, North Carolina, the principal and teachers of Ansonville Elementary School have made remarkable progress over the last three years in enhancing student literacy through the SFA program. Ansonville serves about 240 predominantly rural, African-American students, grades preK-6. In the week prior to the 1994-1995 school year, SFA consultants provided the staff with three days of on-site staff development and added two days per semester

there-
after. In
subsequent
years, training has
been reduced to two days
annually. In the SFA program,
students from the first- through third-grades are homogeneously regrouped by reading level from their homeroom cohort for 90 minutes of daily reading and language arts instruction. Each class has about 15 students. Facilitated by a tutor, the students enjoy read-alouds from quality children's literature, followed by directed reading, word skill activities, paired reading by students, and writing. Twenty minutes of self-selected home reading is also required. Writing involves a writer's workshop format with feedback at each stage from both teachers and peers. Schoolwide assessment and regrouping occurs every eight weeks. A school family support team that promotes parent involvement and a staff support team that provides ongoing peer coaching support the program. All activities are supervised by a part-time, on-site SFA facilitator who trains new teachers, models lessons, and serves as a mentor for the teaching staff.

Analyses of 1997 end-of-grade standardized reading test scores exhibit some encouraging results. Fifty-six percent of third-grade students, 50 percent of fourth-grade students, and 38 percent of fifth-grade students performed at or above grade level. The remarkable news, however, is that greater exposure to SFA is positively correlated with a reduction in the white-minority achievement gap across all tested grade levels. At grade 6 (no SFA exposure), the gap is nearly 56 points; at grade 5 (one-year exposure), the gap is about 36.5 points; at grade 4 (two-years' exposure), the gap is still about 36.5 points; at grade 3 (three-years' exposure), the gap is less than 16 points. Clearly, something is working.

Students are scaling new literacy heights at Mountain Park Elementary in Lithonia, Georgia, and Partee Elementary in Stone Mountain, Georgia, where teachers have adapted Reading Recovery strategies in a program called, "Reading Express." Mountain Park and Partee are located in Gwinnett County, a fast-growing suburb of Atlanta. Reading Express grew primarily from the efforts of a former Mountain Park principal who brought with him previous experience with Reading Recovery. He hired a Reading Recovery specialist whose extraordinary student results began to arouse curiosity among regular classroom teachers. Desiring the same outcomes for all students, not merely the lowest 20 percent of first-graders, teachers began to meet at the nearby home of the Reading Recovery teacher for staff development. The program evolved into a set of lessons which provides not only individual instruction commensurate with the original Reading Recovery format, but also instruction for both small groups and entire first-grade classrooms as well.

Focusing on literacy skills—such as what to do when you see a word you do not know—the Reading Recovery teacher leads the class during one-hour blocks one day a week with students participating in follow-up practice activities with the classroom teacher. Three days per week, children work for one hour daily in two Literacy Stations designed to extend the introduced literacy skill. On the fifth day of the week, the Reading Recovery teacher works one-on-one with any student requiring assistance. Extensive assessment provides the opportunity for the homogeneously ability-grouped children to move into or out of groups as needed. Assessment includes teacher logs of

class activities, strength and weakness records, and pre-/post-tests for each individual student using the Reading Recovery Observation Survey and an Individual Reading Inventory.

What results have Gwinnett County teachers obtained with Reading Express? At Mountain Park Elementary School, the year-end median reading difficulty level rose from 14 (beginning first grade) to 30 (sixth grade) over the first three years of implementation. Expressed another way, over four-fifths of all students were achieving average to excellent for their grade cohort. Mountain Park teachers have dropped the term "non-reader" by the end of first grade because it is no longer needed! As a new school, Partee is able to report only results from the first quarter of 1997. Records show that first-grade students reading below grade level fell from 58 percent to 33 percent in the quarter. Additionally, first-grade teachers report positive relationships between the model and student progress. They assert that students see themselves as "readers" as they are able to discuss context-specific reading strategies; consequently, students are becoming more independent and joyful readers.

In the Guilford County, North Carolina, Schools (host district of Jesse Wharton Elementary discussed earlier), "Reading Together" provides the opportunity for fifth-grade students to tutor second-grade students who are performing below grade level. A collaborative project of the Guilford County Schools, the National Council of Jewish Women Institute for Educational Innovation at Hebrew University, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, this peer tutoring program utilizes structured reading sessions designed to ensure that tutees have positive reading experiences. The program occurs in three phases. In Phase One, selected fifth-grade tutors receive nine training sessions and lead 15 meetings with second-grade tutees. During these 35-45 minute tutorials, the students read aloud and engage in discussion. Once the tutees return to their classrooms, the tutors meet with the coordinating teacher to review the session. Additional planning meetings are scheduled to prepare for the next session with the tutees. Phase Two includes 10 sessions using books and support materials preselected for the tutee. During the five sessions of Phase Three, the students choose their own books and apply what they have learned through the project.

In addition to providing effective assistance for children experiencing early reading difficulty, "Reading Together" also challenges tutors to improve their reading fluency and comprehension skills as well as to develop social skills. Although the project is only in its first year of operation, anecdotal evidence from three pilot schools in Greensboro suggests that the impact of the project is quite favorable. In fact, project planners have identified six expansion school sites for next year.

Strategy 5

Identifying Book Lists: Considering Ways to Encourage/Celebrate Reading Comprehension Through Meaningful Student-led Discussions

Research tells us that students who read more self-selected, developmentally appropriate books read better and at increased rates than those whose reading is primarily teacher-selected and without regard for individual differences in ability.[11] The challenge is to find ways to motivate students to engage with print they choose, preferably with connected text that is written at a level commensurate with their ability.

A possible solution, or starting point, that many schools across the Southeast have adopted is the Accelerated Reader program.[12] The primary features of the program include codifying children's literature by level of reading difficulty and using a computer to access comprehension tests based on the literature. After reading an approved, self-selected book, the student reader self-administers the test for that book. Adequate test scores, usually 80 percent or more correct responses, determine advancement in difficulty level for the individual student reader. Records of student performance are maintained by the program coordinator—often the school media specialist—and shared regularly with classroom teachers. Typi-

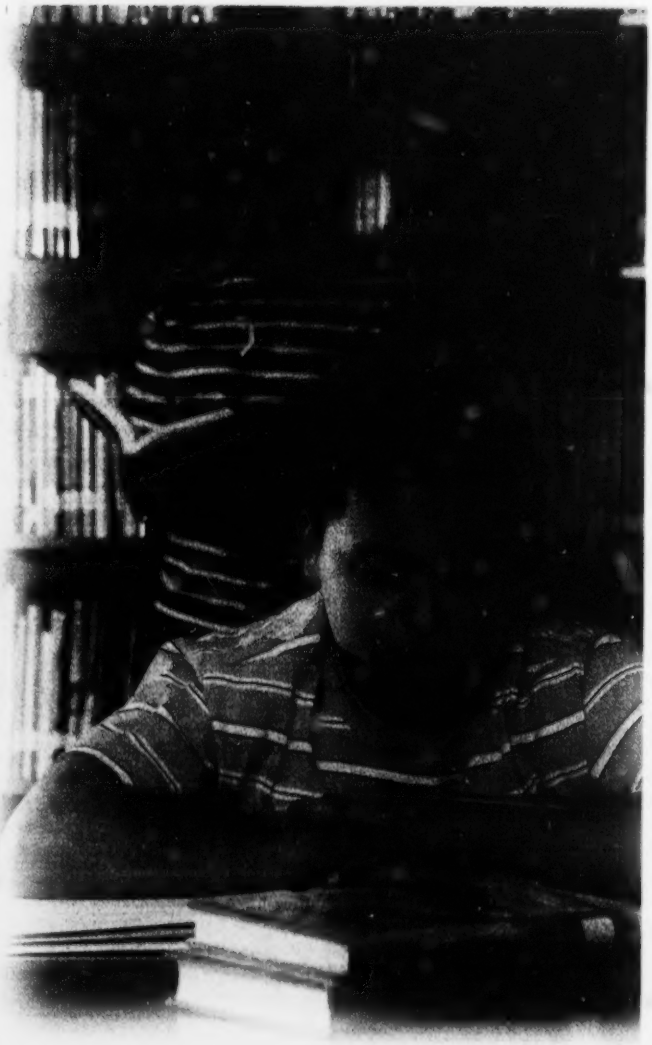
[11] *Fielding and Pearson, 1994; Krashen, 1993.*
[12] *Advantage Learning Systems, 1995.*

cally, incentives, such as certificates, prizes, parties, and field trips, are provided for students who successfully accumulate a predetermined number of points.

Although many schools in our study use Accelerated Reader as one of several components in their reading program, implementation and literacy outcomes at two southeastern sites are particularly noteworthy—Royall Elementary School in Florence, South Carolina, and Parmer Elementary School in Greenville, Alabama. Demographically, Royall Elementary is a K-5 school populated by about 480 urban students representing whites and African-Americans about evenly. Nearly half the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Accelerated Reader was introduced at Royall in 1989 as a means of motivating students to read for pleasure and to be rewarded for doing so. Supported by ongoing training from Reading Renaissance consultants and resources,[13] classroom teachers at Royall ensure literacy success by

- Diagnosing students' reading level at the beginning of the school year and periodically thereafter
- Conferencing with students and instructing them in specific reading strategies
- Regularly setting goals and monitoring progress
- Pre-assessing students on their comprehension of self-selected Accelerated Reader books
- Allotting 60 minutes daily for silent, sustained reading of the books

The process is described as one of motivating, instructing, monitoring, and intervening. Each week the Royall media specialist, who is also the Accelerated Reader program coordinator, meets with every grade-level team to discuss an "at-risk report" of students scoring lower than 80-percent correct on the comprehension tests. The coordinator and the principal not only discuss units currently being taught in each classroom, but they identify specific intervention strategies to use with students. Moreover, the coordinator suggests related television shows and other relevant instructional resources designed to enhance teaching and learning during the reading and writing processes.



Attributable in part to the Accelerated Reader program, significant literacy outcomes have accrued for Royall students. In addition, the school has earned both state and national recognition for its literacy accomplishments, including a South Carolina Writing Award in 1991 and a Literacy Spot Award in 1996. Royall Elementary is currently a demonstration site for the Reading Renaissance and Accelerated Reader program.

Like Royall, Parmer Elementary School adopted Accelerated Reader in an effort to motivate more students to read. Populated by about 1150 economically disadvantaged, K-4th grade, rural African-American students, Parmer was placed in aca-

[13] *The Institute for Academic Excellence, 1997.*

demic "Caution" in 1995 pursuant to Alabama Department of Education sanctions for low-performing schools. Directed to raise standardized test scores or face state assistance team intervention, school leaders identified Accelerated Reader and Reading Renaissance as a focus for change. Program implementation strategies included bringing apprehensive parents on-board in Open House presentations and through sharing children's success. Teachers learned necessary computer competencies. Students came to recognize the motivational and assessment value in knowing their reading level. Unlike Royall Elementary which has all but abolished the use of Accelerated Reader rewards because of a desire to enhance intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation for reading, a comprehensive system of incentives and recognition drive the program at Parmer. Teachers insist, however, that students' love of reading has become the primary motivation at Parmer and that the rewards are only "icing on the cake." Like Royall, 60 minutes daily is set aside at Parmer for self-selected reading for each child. Reading level assessment is conducted five times a year.

As implementation of Accelerated Reader has less than a two-year history at Parmer, literacy outcomes are not as marked as at Royall; however, the school's progress on raising standardized test scores in reading removed in one year the necessity of state intervention. In fact, primary grade teachers were sufficiently impressed with student excitement about reading after the first semester of implementation at grades 3 and 4, that they insisted on their students' inclusion. In response, Accelerated Reader is now available for all but kindergarten students at Parmer. Teachers, too, report a heightened sense of achievement and professionalism due both to the training received pursuant to Reading Renaissance and Accelerated Reader program and their students' unprecedented success in reading.

Strategy 6

Developing Schoolwide Portfolios Based on Regular Assessments of Reading and Writing Competencies: Redesigning Report Cards: Conferencing with Students and Parents

Believing that instruction and assessment in a continuous progress model maximizes reading achievement, educators are increasingly choosing to group students and measure their learning outcomes in nontraditional ways. Their beliefs are supported by research which shows that assessment and grouping may be key levers in improving the quality and quantity of students' reading and writing.[14] New strategies for assessing student's reading growth include the development and use of schoolwide portfolios, new report cards, and the use of multiage/multigrade classrooms.

Student portfolios may contain written work samples, documentation of books read, reflection on work, and communication between the teacher and student, to name a few possible entries. The portfolio may or may not be illustrative of each student's "best" work. Ideally, all teachers in the school use student portfolios and pass them along to the child's subsequent teacher. One obvious benefit of portfolios is that the student becomes a more reflective, responsible reader and writer. Another benefit is that the teacher can more clearly understand the student's unique learning style. From an assessment standpoint, contents of the portfolio provide insight into the child's thinking as sampled in various points across the year. Portfolios, consistent with a continuous progress model, clearly display a student's valu-

[14] *Knuth and Jones, 1991.*

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able day-to-day learning and achievement rather than zeroing in on individual assignments or tests.

Continuous assessment is key to the multiage/multigrade classroom, whether used all day or only for specific instructional periods. The multiage/multigrade classroom addresses the problem of different rates of development by grouping developmentally similar students (for example, kindergarten through grade 2). In addition, looping extends a teacher's knowledge of student progress by assigning the same teacher to the same students two years in a row. When combined with schoolwide portfolio assessment, multiage/multigraded looped classrooms offer a powerful and effective way for students to learn.

Two schools in this study have particularly compelling multiage/multigrade and alternative assessment or portfolio programs—Club Boulevard Elementary in Durham, North Carolina, and LaBelle Elementary in LaBelle, Florida. Teachers at Club Boulevard reassign like-ability students from varying grade levels to specific classrooms for extended periods of time for interdisciplinary lessons. A research lesson might involve addressing the following question: What barriers did the Wright Brothers have to overcome in their attempt to fly? Working as individuals or in multiage/multigrade teams, students access information in the area of science, mathematics, and social studies and create a communication arts product, such as a skit, poster, written report, or even a song. According to Club Boulevard teachers, the goal is to employ student-centered, individualized instruction. Multiage/multigrade grouping and performance assessment provide unique opportunities to create reflective, literate, learning communities.

Similarly, LaBelle Elementary School, located in the orange growing region about 30 miles east of Ft. Myers, Florida, has demonstrated amazing results through reconfiguring the school day. LaBelle School, student population 772, serves overwhelmingly economically disadvantaged, rural children, 54 percent Hispanic (the majority of whom are in the ESL program), 41 percent white, and 5 percent African-American, grades preK-5. Selected teachers participate in a continuous progress, multiage instruction program which has enhanced every facet of student performance, including reading development. The continuous progress design enables four teachers and their students, grades K-2 or 3-5, to be grouped in varying instructional arrangements for up to three years. The essential element, however, is that instruction is developmentally appropriate—as students demonstrate readiness for higher literacy levels, the design accommodates their needs. Two years ago, LaBelle Elementary was recognized as a Florida "Higher-Performing, High-Poverty" Title I school with 48 percent of students performing above the 50th percentile on the Florida standardized test for reading.

At LaBelle Elementary School, teachers build similar learning communities in their multiage/multigrade classrooms. Similar to the Club Boulevard model, students are regrouped throughout the day for instruction in language arts/social studies, math/science, or some other subject combination commensurate with teachers' prerogative and training. In addition, LaBelle has designed and implemented a Writing Evaluation Portfolio. The portfolio is actually a report card containing descriptions of foci, organization, elaboration/development, and conventions for writing at every grade level. An assessment grid provides for checking students' writing as demonstrating "no evidence," "emerging evidence," or "frequent use of" (grades 1-2) and "high," "medium," or "low" (grades 3-5) appropriate writing practices.

Strategy 7

Offering Reading Courses: Developing Teacher Study Groups: Instituting Teacher Book Study Clubs

A survey of teacher preparatory programs in southeastern schools and colleges of education revealed that no more than one course in reading pedagogy is typically required of teacher graduates.[15] Given the importance of literacy to overall student achievement, one might guess that more emphasis would be placed upon the teach-

[15] *Public School Forum of North Carolina, 1996.*

ing of reading, especially for elementary education majors. For a variety of reasons, this is not the case. Consequently, the burden of learning to teach reading and writing beyond a one-semester, pre-service course falls either to chance, trial-and-error, or in-service training.

Understanding that many teachers need more knowledge of reading research and pedagogy, many southeastern schools are offering formal courses in reading as a starting point for literacy improvement. In Florence, South Carolina, for example, the principal at Royall Elementary and principals of the other schools in Florence District One are required to complete a graduate course in reading as part of their ongoing professional development plan. Of particular interest is the staff development offered at Westfield, Shoals, and other Surry County North Carolina elementary schools where administrators and teachers have designed a program that provides for an on-site, graduate-level course in reading to be taught throughout the year. Termed "Developing Efficient Readers," the program grew from the awareness that a holistic philosophy of reading was not understood and that teachers were inadequately prepared to teach reading. An expert consultant conducted volunteer teacher workshops on Friday evenings and weekends, a practice that continued for five years. Funding from a Goals 2000 grant allowed for the addition of a summer Lab school where mentor teachers, under the consultant's guidance, assisted peers as they taught reading to students. In addition to the Lab school, "Developing Efficient Readers" is characterized by peer coaching, support team assistance, significant parent involvement, and the service of a literacy specialist. A 50-hour graduate-level course in reading and writing is delivered to participating teachers by the consultant during the year prior to the teachers' summer Lab experience. The textbooks used include Cambourne's *The Whole Story*, Goodman, Watson, and Burke's *Reading Miscue Inventory*, Graves' *A Fresh Look at Writing*, and Smith's *Reading Without Nonsense*.[16] An additional 50 hours is earned in the supervised practicum at the Lab school resulting in a total of 100 training hours; plus, a reading endorsement is added to their teaching license.

[16] *Crafton, 1991.*

Students with trained teachers scored far better on end-of-grade tests than those whose teachers received no training. Students of trained teachers typically achieve above-average proficiency in reading. Higher, positive parent and student attitudes toward reading and writing as revealed in surveys and self-assessments demonstrate the benefits of the program. Anecdotal evidence from teacher interviews also reveals a heightened sense of competence and professionalism as they relate success stories of reluctant readers gaining literacy confidence and fluency.

Strategy 8

Using Consultants, Mentors, and Peer Coaches

Research and best practice on school reform suggest benefits accrue from using outside consultants to identify problems and build capacity, experts from outside or inside to serve as mentors, and peer coaches to invite reflection and mas-

tery.[17] As a reform initiative, reading improvement requires ongoing problem identification, capacity building, and continuous engagement with new instructional practices over a long period of time. SERVE's school visits suggest that the effort is most effectively supported by professionals assigned to an instructional support role. If resources prohibit the hiring of a staff member whose job is dedicated to teacher support, another teacher may be used.

Several schools used consultants, mentors, or peer coaches in their reading improvement initiatives. Among those who developed long-term relationships with reading consultants was Babson Park Elementary in Babson Park, Florida.; Central Elementary and other district schools in Elizabeth City/Pasquotank County, North Carolina; Shoals and Westfield Elementary and other district schools in Surry County, North Carolina; and Jesse Wharton Elementary in Greensboro, North Carolina. Others, such as Mountain Park and Partee Elementary in Gwinnett County, Georgia, use reading specialists as internal mentors. Peer coaches are used in most of the schools visited. Some schools, for example, those in the Poplarville Separate School District in Mississippi, have formalized the process of peer coaching by using teachers to help other teachers meet annual goals in their professional growth plans. (See the SERVE publication, *Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems that Support Professional Growth*, 1993).

Strategy 9

Using Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum

Research underscores the need to teach reading in the content areas.[18] To develop readers who transfer reading skills and strategies beyond reading instruction—that is, to teach students to read for information—schools should emphasize reading across the curriculum (just as they have with writing).

A noteworthy site in our study where reading and writing across the curriculum is a schoolwide focus is Elizabeth City Middle School in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Elizabeth City Middle is one of the schools serving the 6,000 students of the Elizabeth City/Pasquotank County district. About 916 students in grades 7-8 attend Elizabeth City Middle, a school which has implemented a number of cross-disciplinary literacy practices. For example, students keep journals and hold book conferences in all classes. Even mathematics instruction typically requires writing, as illustrated in the following example:

Which of these decimals is less than 0.427?
a. 0.43
b. 0.428
c. 0.441
d. 0.42
Explain with words.

Dramatic, scripted portrayals of historic events, online research using the Internet, using and explaining graphs, and writing about critical societal problems for social studies classes are also common instructional events at Elizabeth City Middle.

[17] *Robbins, 1991.*
[18] *Billmeyer, 1996.*

Strategy 10

Implementing Schoolwide Reading Events: Identifying Community Resources

Children are keen observers, taking their cue from adult behavior as to what is and is not truly valued. Expert practitioners and researchers suggest that implementing a schoolwide reading period and engaging storytellers and authors in the classroom are effective ways to show students that reading and writing matter.[19] The fact that such practices and programs are employed by all teachers in the school underscores the commonality of purpose within the school community and is, consequently, one of the underlying reasons for their success.

Effective implementation of a schoolwide reading program involves setting aside 15 to 30 minutes for the entire school, including both students and teachers, to silently read a book of their choice. Further value for reading is created when child or adult storytellers relate tales from their own or others' experience. If these stories or experiences are written down, the storyteller becomes an author, which reinforces the importance of writing as a component in the reading program.

A number of southeastern schools are demonstrating their commitment to teaching students to value reading through schoolwide reading periods, storytellers, and authors. Maryvale Elementary in Mobile, Alabama, and Jesse Wharton Elementary in Greensboro, North Carolina, typify this group. Maryvale School serves about 864 inner city children, grades K-5, 98 percent of whom are African-American and receive free or reduced-price lunch. Many children are from single-parent homes and reside in one of the nearby subsidized housing projects. The Maryvale principal reports that reading became a focus for improvement when the Alabama Department of Education placed the school under "Alert" for insufficient academic performance on standardized achievement tests. As a result of extensive professional development both on- and off-site, principals and teachers at Maryvale adopted numerous organizational and instructional changes.

One practice implemented required specified reading time for both school- and classroom-based reading. Accordingly, the first 15 minutes of every day at Maryvale is devoted to sustained, silent reading for every student in the school. Recognizing the importance of modeling, teachers, as well, put aside their work to read. Additionally, every student in the school spends at least one hour daily in a Josten's Learning Lab on computer-assisted literacy tasks. Children most in need of reading improvement are assigned to the Lab for 60 minutes two afternoons each week as well. In addition, Maryvale students visit a writing center several times each week to compose stories and reports. Students' work generated on computers with word processing and graphics software is displayed on bulletin boards throughout the hallways and classrooms. Every common area bulletin board has a literary theme, documenting a book studied by a particular class and a higher-order thinking skill, such as productive thinking, decision making, and forecasting. Maryvale teachers further create value for literacy by using a schoolwide postal service to deliver student mail to the boxes prominently displayed outside each classroom. The principal, an extraordinary cheerleader for reading and writing within the school community, often writes brochures for parents. The brochure advocates the notion of lifelong learning and encourages parents to read with their children at least 15 minutes a day.

The emphasis on schoolwide literacy improvement has paid off well for Maryvale. The school was recognized in 1994 as a National Blue Ribbon School and in 1997 as an International Reading Association award winner. Attesting to the ways in which Maryvale teachers infuse literacy with higher-order thinking skills, the school is also a national demonstration site for the Talents Unlimited program. Standardized test scores have also resulted in Maryvale's pronouncement as academically "Clear," as grades 2-5 averaged a gain of 11 percentile points in one critical year with second-grade alone accounting for a 20-point increase.

Jesse Wharton Elementary School leaders, determined to meet the increasing demands for aca-

[19] *Routman, 1996; Langer, 1988.*

demic excellence from business and community leaders, obtained funding for an improvement effort called "The Learning Circle: A Partnership Approach." As part of this partnership, community mentors and literacy tutors convey the message to students that reading and writing matter. Family Reading Nights are held at the school with parents participating in literacy tasks with their children. Community leaders routinely visit the school to listen to students read aloud. Students write to each other and to community members who visit the school. Grandparents share stories with classrooms. One of the most interesting ways that Wharton teachers have created value for literacy, however, involves a student video club. Merging literacy with technology, students meet after school to write scripts, operate the video camera, coordinate the music or other soundtracks, and serve as anchors for the "Jesse Wharton Morning Show" broadcast daily at the school.

Once distinguished by its bland academic performance, Wharton School is now recognized as a leader in the educational community. Exceeding expectations for growth in reading and mathematics, Wharton students achieved "Exemplary" status on end-of-grade tests during 1997. Wharton has been particularly honored to receive a Governor's Entrepreneurial Schools Award for responsible risk-taking and innovation.

Conclusions

Research on low-performing schools in Texas[20] and North Carolina[21] reveals that schools who are doing well with disadvantaged populations are programmatically dissimilar. Rather than revealing uniformity in programs, the consistencies researchers found across successful schools had more to do with school culture, staff commitment, and ways of work. The successful schools were constantly assessing their programs and progress, constantly looking for new ways to meet students' needs.

Thus, the 10 strategies we describe need to be considered in the context of the big picture—that is, in the way the faculty approaches its work. There are indeed many ways up the mountain; however, the attitudes and working relationships among the school's principals, teachers, and parents is indicative of how smoothly, quickly, and safely you reach that mountaintop.

A second observation is that schools described in this study are not doing any one thing exclusively. Most sites are moving toward all 10 desired states in some form. In many cases it was quite challenging for SERVE to decide which way to feature a given school when so many promising practices and programs appeared to be at work. Also, schools' efforts, such as involving parents, often went far beyond improving reading literacy only, positively impacting many areas of the curriculum and instructional outcomes. Improving reading—and school improvement in general—is clearly a multi-faceted job.

[20] *Lein, Johnson, and Ragland, 1996.*
[21] *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1997.*

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Appendix A

Questions Used in School Visits

Why was it necessary to change reading instruction in this school or district?
E.g., stagnant or declining test scores; racial or socioeconomic disparities; outdated instruction

What does your current reading literacy program look like?
E.g., key components; teaching/learning processes; use of time, space, and staff; parent involvement

How does reading and writing instruction differ now as compared with the past?
E.g., eliminated round robins, reading groups, worksheets, spelling lists; added direct instruction in strategic reading

What strategies are in place to diagnose and assist deficient readers?
E.g., tutorials; conferencing; computer assistance; miscue analysis

How has student grouping and assessment changed?
E.g., both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups; continuous progress model; authentic assessment; portfolios

What resources were required to implement your new program?
E.g., more trade books; staff development; consultants; new school schedule; reading specialists

How would you describe the steps in the change process you have gone through?
E.g., problem identification; brainstorming; selling the idea; collaboration; planning; implementation; evaluation

What role did principals and teachers have in the process?
E.g., action researchers; self-assessors; planning partners; customers of the program

How were parents and the community involved in the process?
E.g., partners; not consulted at all; learn new ways to help at home; understand what's going on

How were outside consultants used?
E.g., many or few consultants; directive or facilitative; ongoing relationship; in-class assistance; research only

What components of your staff development seemed to be most effective?
E.g., use of outside consultant; collegial teacher-groups; support or mentor teachers; lab school

What were some of the immediate barriers or problems that you faced?
E.g., no preservation of past; resistance to change; ineffective communication; ineffective leadership

What problems emerged later?
E.g., superficial implementation; resource acquisition/allotment; consultant dependency

What results are you getting?
E.g., improved test scores; self-confident readers/writers; creative writing; success in later grades

What have been some unanticipated outcomes?
E.g., greater parent involvement; enhanced self-esteem; better attendance; social studies/science achievement

Appendix B

List of Schools Visited or Contributing to Publication

School
Ansonville
Elementary School
Betsy Ammons
Principal
Hwy 52 N
Ansonville, NC 28007
Phone 704-826-8337

Strategies Highlighted
Success for All

School
Ben Hill County Schools
Sandra Bostelman
Administrator
P.O. Box 5189
Fitzgerald, GA 31750
Phone 912-423-3320
Fax 912-423-5398

Strategies Highlighted
Parallel Block Scheduling;
Literacy Leadership Team
Training

School
Babson Park
Elementary School
Dale Fair
Principal
815 North Scenic Highway
Babson Park, FL 33827
Phone 941-638-1483

Strategies Highlighted
Parent Portfolio Night

School
Brockington
Elementary School
Greg Mingo
Principal
410 North Brockington
Timmonsville, SC 29161
Phone 803-346-4038

Strategies Highlighted
Cunningham's Four Blocks

School
Central Elementary School
David Christenbury,
Principal
1059 US Hwy 17
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Phone 919-335-4305

Strategies Highlighted
Communication Skills
Leadership Study Groups

School
Club Boulevard
Elementary School
Carolyn Rideout
Principal
400 West Club Boulevard
Durham, NC 27704
Phone 919-560-3918

Strategies Highlighted
Regrouping for
Interdisciplinary Lessons

School
Elizabeth City Middle School
Geraldine Hill
Principal
306 North Road Street
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Phone 919-335-2974

Strategies Highlighted
Reading and Writing Across
the Curriculum

School
Hillcrest Elementary School
Susan Wilson
Principal
Tennessee Street
Morganton, NC 28655
Phone 704-437-4258

Strategies Highlighted
Grouping for SRA/Literature
Circles

School
LaBelle Elementary School
Jan Gann
Principal
150 West Garden Street
LaBelle, FL 33935
Phone 941-674-4150

Strategies Highlighted
Multiage Instruction/Writing
Evaluation Portfolio

School
Maryvale Elementary School
Joyce Hunter
Principal
1901 North Maryvale Street
Mobile, AL 36605
Phone 334-471-1379

Strategies Highlighted
Infuse Literacy With Higher-Order Thinking

School
Mountain Park Elementary School Sandra Webb
Principal
1500 Pounds Road
Lilburn, GA 30247
Phone 770-921-2224

Strategies Highlighted
Reading Recovery and the Reading Express

School
Parmer Elementary School
Alin Whittle
Principal
Butler Circle
Greenville, AL 36037
Phone 334-382-8720

Strategies Highlighted
Accelerated Reader

School
Partee Elementary School
Barbara Lundsford
Principal
4350 Campbell Road
Lithonia, GA 30058
Phone 770-982-6920

Strategies Highlighted
Reading Recovery and the Reading Express

School
Poplarville Lower Elementary
Glenda Malley
Principal
209 Church Street
Poplarville, MS 39470
Phone 601-795-4736

Strategies Highlighted
TALK-12 Teacher Study Groups

School
Poplarville Upper Elementary
Gylde Fitzpatrick
Principal
One Todd Circle
Poplarville, MS 39470
Phone 601-795-8303

Strategies Highlighted
TALK-12 Teacher Study Groups

School
Royall Elementary School
Julie Smith
Principal
1400 Woods Road
Florence, SC 29501
Phone 803-664-8167

Strategies Highlighted
Accelerated Reader Without Incentives; Required Courses in Reading

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School
Sawyer Elementary School
Shelton Davis
Principal
1007 Park Street
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Phone 910-338-8263

Strategies Highlighted
Communication Skills Leadership Study Groups

School
Shoals Elementary School
Teddy Shelton
Principal
RR 2 Shoals Road
Pinnacle, NC 27043
Phone 336-325-2518

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Year-Long Teacher Training Program

School
Westfield Elementary School
Martha Smith
Principal
Jessup Grove Church Road
Pilot Mountain, NC 27041
Phone 336-351-2745

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Sch- ol
Wharton Elementary School
Pandora Bell
Principal
116 Pisgah Church Road
Greensboro, NC 27455
Phone 336-545-2030

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"Reading Together"
Coordinator
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Greensboro, NC 27401
Phone 336-370-2307

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Tutorials and Reading Together Project

Appendix C

What We Know About How Children Learn to Read

The following is from Barbara M. Taylor, P. David Pearson, and Elfrieda H. Hiebert's Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement Web Page, available at www.ciera.org/aboutciera/principles/index.htm

Family and Volunteer Literacy Programs

1. Family literacy programs and volunteer literacy efforts are central to the establishment of lifelong reading habits and high levels of literacy achievement in all communities but especially in high-poverty communities. Strong connections between literacy programs in schools and homes/communities are needed during both the preschool and school years.

Kindergarten and First-grade Reading Experience

2. Children who enter first grade with low levels of phonemic awareness are at considerable risk of failure to read well in first grade and thereafter. Activities that promote phonemic awareness include a variety of activities such as rhyming, letter tracing/writing, and journal writing.

3. Focused and well-designed reading programs in the early primary grades increase levels of reading achievement (on both comprehension and word recognition measures.) These programs include several well-articulated characteristics: (a) systematic phonics instruction, (b) frequent opportunity to read lots of texts of appropriate difficulty, and (c) frequent opportunity to write (and spell) lots of texts of their own.

4. Effective reading teachers have high expectations of students and are deliberate about instruction of reading skills strategies. Effective teachers are aware of the strengths and needs of their students, using various assessment tools to monitor their students' growth in reading skills and strategies.

Reading Instruction for Children with Special Needs

5. Children with learning disabilities benefit from structure in the early phases of literacy instruction but not at the cost of opportunities to engage in meaningful use of reading and writing.

6. The reading and writing of bilingual children benefits from instruction that draws on their existing oral and written language knowledge. In fact, there is considerable evidence that accomplished L1 readers bring a rich array of "extra" metacognitive skills to L2 reading.

Ensuring Successful Reading in Third Grade & Beyond

7. For early success in reading to result in high levels of literacy, children in the late primary and middle grades must continue to receive instruction in strategies that will allow them to negotiate the vocabulary and comprehension demands of different kinds of texts, especially science and social studies texts. Middle-schoolers benefit from instruction on strategies to monitor reading for understanding. Further, daily opportunities to read are significantly related to reading achievement.

Professional Development

8. Programs and schools that are effective in increasing the literacy achievement of at-risk children provide consistent opportunities for teachers to learn about effective reading instruction and to participate in ongoing conversations and support networks where successes are shared and solutions sought for persistent issues.

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Improving Reading is meant for educators who are committed to and excited about helping benchmark their school's efforts to improve reading. It summarizes what a team of SERVE colleagues learned from visits to 18 schools endorsed as having strong reading programs. The schools cited are listed so that you may personalize your benchmarking experience by contacting these schools and comparing progress notes on programs and reading improvement efforts.

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